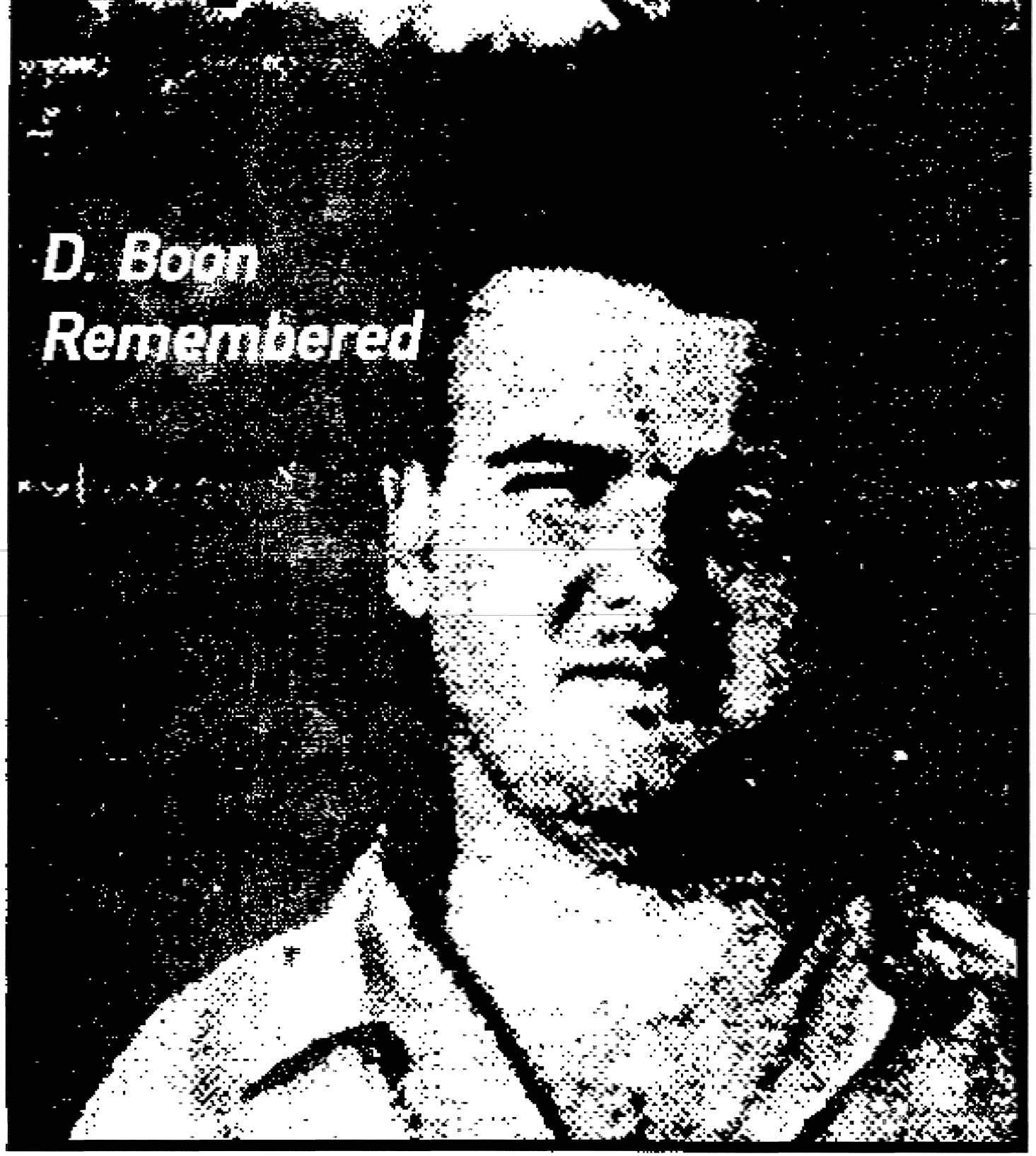
The Squealer

Issue #10 December/January 1995

D. Boon Remembered



D. Boon Remembered

courtesy Tom Troccoli

compiled and edited by Paul Bernstein, Eric Boyer and Laura Brandenburg

American folk heroes have always been big: larger-than-life individuals whose size enabled them to tackle the great wilderness that spread out before them on this vast and bountiful continent. When Dennes Boon packed in his guitar and amps and drove up to the L.A. metropolis from San Pedro with his buddies, the rockin' world was about to be turned on its ear. D. Boon, a self-proclaimed singer and activist, was, as he put it, "shouting essential information." For many a musician and music lover, this voice crying deep in the wilderness was and continues to be a beacon of truth in a morass of cynical opportunism and crass commercialism.

In the decade since Dennes' passing, a lot has changed. The music industry has seen a complete overhaul with the infusion of what was once called punk into the mainstream world of big business; a space shuttle exploded; the Iron Curtain fell; the "evil empire" of the former Soviet Union collapsed and kids no longer wake up in the morning wondering if they'll be vaporized on their way to school. The world is indeed a smaller place than it was on December 23rd, 1985—and it still *ain't no picnic*.

When Dennes Boon was killed in a car crash ten years ago the world lost more than just a singer and guitar player in one of the most influential rock bands to ever look down at a slam pit. We lost a true humanitarian; a giant of a man with a giant heart who genuinely cared about his music, his politics, his friends, and his fans.

We have talked with a number of people who knew or were touched by Dennes Boon: people who loved him and whose lives were changed by him in ways they could not define. The enthusiastic response of the witnesses to his life are proof positive of Dennes Boon's inspirational legacy.

Joe Baiza

The first time I saw D. Boon he was playing with the Reactionaries. Mike Watt was playing bass, George Hurley was on drums, and they had Martin Tambourovich singing. I was in school and I checked out this flyer. It said something like "Punk rock invades Long Beach." I said, "Wow, man. Punk rock in Long Beach?" I just thought that was amazing. It turned out to be the Suburban Lawns. They used to have their studio there and they'd put on gigs. And there they were: the Reactionaries. They started a couple songs, and I was drinking and walking around, they stopped after two or three songs. I asked Dennes Boon what's going on, and he said, "Oh, the bass player broke his bass." It turns out that (Watt told me later on) he just passed out. He fell on his bass and broke it. So after that gig I didn't see them for a long time.

Then I moved to San Pedro and I was living in this apartment with a friend of mine. I remember the landlord saying there was this guy who lived upstairs, he's got two jobs...plays music or something. I was starting to play with Jack Brewer (Saccharine Trust) then. I remember coming home at night sometimes, I'd be lying on the floor and I'd hear some guy working on a Who song. He's doing the Pete Townshend parts on "Pinball Wizard" or something. I was really into punk rock at the time, so I sort of looked down on this guy in disgust.

So anyway, about a week later I was practicing with Jack Brewer and someone knocks on the door. I'm thinking, "Oh shit, someone's going to complain." I open the door, and this chubby guy with an army jacket, long hair, and a PiL button, says, "Hey, how you guys doin'?" I'm thinking, "Who is this?" Some stooge/new wave rock dude or something. He says, "I just thought I'd say hello. I live upstairs..." I say, "Oh you're the guy." So we're talking and I wasn't too interested in him and he says, "Yeah, I used to be in a band called the Reactionaries." All of a sudden it hit me. I remembered seeing them in Long Beach and thinking they were pretty cool. So we talked and made friends. Then I met Mike Watt.

They were starting the Minutemen at that time. They'd be upstairs where D. Boon lived. They'd play these games sometimes, some kind of war game. lay out a big map and it takes three days to play, really kind of involved. I remember hearing them argue like "blah Blah BLAH BLAH BLAH!!!" Then BAM, the door would slam and I'd see Mike running down the stairs.

They invited me up once and we talked, they played me some of their tunes. They were going to audition for this gig at Harbor College that this girl was putting on, and I helped set it up for them. When I first heard the Minutemen, it was really surreal to me. I couldn't tell where one song ended and the other began. Their songs were so strange anyway, so short. Really strange, jagged songs. I thought, "Wow, this is great!" So they played that show at Harbor College and it went over pretty well. I think at that show Greg Ginn asked them to play on SST. So we were trying to set up our own scene in San Pedro.

Me and D. Boon would go around to this place called Capone's. We'd go there and play. We'd try to convince other bar owners to have bands. The Minutemen started to get popular. They were great, everytime I went to see them I was never let down. Around that time we kind of split up. I didn't see much of Dennes then. There was always this sort of competition between us. It kind of tripped me out. I didn't understand the idea of bands competing on the same bill. Watt would say sometimes, "We're gonna wipe you up off the floor." So one day I said to Dennes, "I'm gonna challenge you to a guitar battle!" Kind of jokingly, and Dennes tells Watt. Watt then goes and sets up this guitar battle. So we were on the same bill one night and between sets D. Boon and I are up on stage trading guitar noises and stuff. It was a lot of fun.

As time went by I really didn't see him anymore. Near the end we started being friendly again and he invited me over a few times, but I never stopped by. When he died it was kind of sad for me. I should have taken that time to get to know him again, but I didn't. It was really tragic when that whole thing happened because it wasn't just D. Boon, but the band was gone too. They were a real inspiration for a lot of people, especially people from San Pedro. I remember being so depressed that for a while I didn't want to play the guitar anymore. Like, what's the use? I'd watch him and grow and improve and progress. It was very inspiring. When they were gone it was like, "Now what? What's the use?" I had to come out of it somehow. I guess I used it to inspire myself, to push myself a little bit further. His death made me look at myself and try to progress; to look inside for inspiration.

Peter Jesperson

On Halloween of 1984 I was managing the Replacements and we got a gig opening up for the Minutemen at Cal Arts, the Disney design and animation college in Valencia, California. The place was completely decked out in Disney regalia and art students in elaborate costumes; everything as over-the-top as you can imagine. The backdrop of the stage was a huge castle with Mickey Mouse perched at the top but instead of giant ears, Mickey had giant devil horns on his head.

The Replacements sounded great that night and the Minutemen played so well. It was a landmark show for me, and those guys, D. Boon, Mike Watt, all of them, were really the nicest guys. The two bands shared a dressing room and during the time we all spent together I got a good sense of their all-for-one-and-one-for-all attitude. They were never on any rock star trip or anything like it.

I remember Mike Watt bouncing in and out of the dressing room in a clown suit doing this stream-of-consciousness, psychedelically-induced monologue, and everybody, I mean *everybody*, at some point had to leave the room because we were laughing so hard. Watt was just cracking us all up, even Paul Westerberg. We were all laughing so much that it hurt. I remember that night well and I don't think I saw D. Boon again after that.

"Dennes was a wonderful person."

- Chuck Dukowski

Grant Hart

courtesy Grant Hart

The feeling of the holidays was really in the air, or that's the way it seems like it felt that day. Everyone at the office was getting ready for the Christmas party later on in the afternoon. This was when our band shared the upstairs of Nicollet Studios with Twin/Tone Records. Bob and I grabbed the band checkbook and left for a while, impulsively shopping for gifts and party favors for later. I remember he found this little blackboard at Target that he felt like getting for the Twin/Tone people. It was really sweet the way he described how they would be able to use it. Cute, in fact.

At around three o'clock everyone stopped working and we had our little Christmas party. Coffee, cookies, funny presents. Not the wild bacchanal that outsiders would suspect. These were people who would more likely than not run into each other after work, seeing a band at the Entry or something.

Probably at around four o'clock the phone rang.

I believe Roz, the receptionist then and now, was upstairs with everyone having a cookie. I walked into my corner office and answered the phone.

The distraught voice on the other end was that of my friend in Hollywood, Susan. "Dennes is dead," she told me, "and Jeanine isn't expected to live." Jeanine was Susan's roommate and a member of the SST Records staff.

Susan had been called by the authorities in Quartzite, Arizona where the van that Jeanine, D. Boon and his girlfriend Linda had been traveling in flipped over after one of the front wheels went into a ditch. We had recently bought an identical van on the Minutemen's recommendation: a 1986 Dodge Ram with the extended cargo area. Dennes was sleeping in the back, and when the van rolled he was crushed and re-crushed by the equipment in the back. Since she was towards the front, Jeanine broke her back and her sister Linda sustained only minor injuries, although she suffered from many accusations since she had been behind the wheel in a one-car accident.

Susan had other people she needed to get in touch with, so our call was not a long, chatty one. There wasn't a shortage of shock when I returned to the party and told people what had just been told to me. Not much cheer was possible after that, so the party broke up into grieving individuals going their own ways.

I called Mike Watt's answering machine. His voice on his answering machine was the single most painful sound I have ever heard in my life. To this day, I have been unable to think of any loss so great as the one suffered by Mike and George that day.

I don't remember the occasion I met D., but it happened in Los Angeles, California. We came out to record our second album and stayed at SST. Lots has been written about the "old" SST. If your impression of it is one of a grubby, punker squat smelling of bodies, then you have received accurate information.

Dennes lived in an apartment close by. Back in those days he would host barbecue there that would feed everybody. His specialty was catfish burritos. I didn't know what cilantro was until I went shopping at Safeway with D. Boon. One of the very best meals of my life was at a fine, family style Mexican restaurant, preceded by a joint of choice Humboldt County green bud. The blissful afterglow following that dinner is fresh in my mind to this day. Even the smell of cilantro brings to mind happy thoughts every time. Every single time. Even though he was a great big guy who loved good food, he could whip twice his weight in fascists any day of the month.

His girlfriend Linda was a vegetarian. When they lived together D. Boon would maintain that lifestyle at home, but admitted to sneaking in a delicious hamburger when the craving was ripe. Around the house he enjoyed Kahlua and whole milk, which was a rich mixture to say the least. Before he met Linda he once said, "I don't want girls to fuck me because of who I really am, I want them to fuck me because I'm in the Minutemen." His sarcasm was obvious but he really did place that much importance on his membership in the Minutemen. He loved George and Mike.

The first time they came to Minneapolis was on tour with Black Flag. I think the show was at the Upper Deck. A few people in town have great anecdotes from that gig and (given a chance) will undoubtedly tell their stories themselves. When we would share a billing we would take turns playing the different spots on the bill. The two bands kept things as equal as we could to the point where Husker held up the release of *Zen Arcade* so that the Minutemen could release *Double Nickels On The Dime* on the same day. We did all sorts of mini-tours together. All the SST bands played with each other a lot, probably owing to the control freaks who ran the company. Black Flag always headlined when they were on the bill.

One time we got stuck with a dead van outside of Bakersfield, CA. Dennes came with his van to rescue us and spent the next few days traveling with us. His personality made the switch from rock star to roadie without any problem. He truly lived the life of the singer/activist, whose pride was his work, whose goals were hopes for the collective and whose love was the love of all people.